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The Art Gallery

JAMES CARROLL BECKWITH.



OF all tourists the sketching tourist ought to be the happiest, because in his cherished albums he bears about with him a living memory. He makes a sumpter-horse of his notebook, and charges it with his impressions, to be unpacked when he needs them as fresh as ever. "I had rather have three touches of color made on the spot upon prepared board than all the assurances of my memory," said Gérôme lately, in

some of his published notes. With these mnemonics the subject of the present sketch is very well equipped. It is not easy to understand what right he has to his magnificent hand, his sweeping touch at once broad and true, for there is nothing in his derivation or origin to make him a designer "de race." To inherit such an implement one should be born in the shadow of the Parthenon and trained in the school of the Caracci, at least. But Beckwith was born at Hannibal, Missouri, and grew up with the growth of Chicago—an environment more fit to turn out industrial than ideal art. A born idealist, almost a born voluptuary, one who, when he first encountered Veronese and Tiepolo, struck hands with them and cried, "Oh, my prophetic soul! I am of your family!"—this classical spirit could have found but little pabulum for his particular porringer in the great life-skirmish of the South and West.

He was born in 1852. His father, while he was a child, removed northward, and prepared to educate his sons for those great business careers whose centres are in the western cities. Carroll received his academic education in select school establishments of Canandaigua and Yonkers, and after an ample literary training removed to Chicago, uncertain whether to join his brothers in the world-compelling lines of western commerce, or indulge his native taste for art.

Before the Chicago fire there was a surprising life in the art-movement of that city. Healey, a winning character, who makes himself everybody's friend and gets everything he wants, had done wonders for the Academy of Design. His painting of "Franklin at the Court of Louis XVI." was considered a masterpiece, and a greater marvel existed in the Historical Society's rooms in the sketch by Couture of the "Prodigal Son." The boys of Chicago used to turn in on their way from school and contemplate these marvels, in which they found an unction and a hint of color quite different from anything to be stared at in the print-shops. At the head of the Academy of Design was my old fellow-pupil under Gérôme, Conrad Diehl, who once dragged Gérôme up innumerable flights of stairs in the Rue Bo-

naparte to criticise his "Hamlet," a Germanesque conception painted at Munich. Church (the etcher) and Shirlaw were then practising art in Chicago, and Shirlaw presently became the successor at the Academy of the raw and confident Diehl.

Beckwith was thus in a fair way to become a rather wild and western genius, with a palette of Indian war-paints and a bright home in the setting sun. The Chicago fire saved him from that apotheosis. In 1871 he left the smoking ruins, and decided to push his nascent talents to their quickest development, in aid of an embarrassed father and a family sinking from thrift to discouragement. At this period he lived for a while with his maternal uncle, Mr. Sherwood, one of our most opulent and liberal patrons of painting, in the city of New York. He assiduously attended the classes of our Academy of Design, under the tutelage of Mr. Wilmarth, and acquired the usual plaster-cast fashion of design, with all the aptness of a hand ready to make the most of any educational impression that happened to be passing.



PENCIL SKETCH BY J. CARROLL BECKWITH.

The plaster-cast style of drawing was quickly found to be not enough. His New York friends were leaving the American shore for Europe every season in shoals in quest of a more advanced guidance in painting. Beckwith soon packed up a slender kit, and in 1873 bade adieu to his kind uncle. Not yet a man, he landed in a continental port, and made straight for Paris, uncertain how to buy or beg that commodity he had come for, an education. By that time the entrance of foreigners to the Beaux Arts school had become hampered by many restrictions, differing sadly from earlier days, when a request from the American minister was usually all we needed to secure admission. Beckwith called on one of the Beaux Arts professors, the late Isidore Pils. The little great man was particularly uncivil, and the boy determined that no hope of future advantage should induce him to sit at the feet of

a bear for a Gamaliel. The pay-class of Bonnat, as a more independent school than the governmental one, was next tried; but Bonnat, by some unlucky harsh word or black look, repelled his would-be pupil, who fell back upon Carolus Duran, the genial Lille painter, who leads to victory such a crowd of happy American youths, confiding in their master as in an elder brother. The young and handsome "patron" quickly made friends with his boyish transatlantic visitor, and soon knew how to evoke the germs of his supple and tractable talent. Soon Beckwith was invited into the private studio of Carolus, to trace his designs upon the canvas, to lay in backgrounds and continue draperies, to absorb, in fact, all that more intimate and connected instruction which actual participation in the master's schemes confers. It was a proud day for the American when he was actually allowed to paint and finish a sofa arm or a vase in one of the master's portraits, and on the first occasion the pupil felt that he had fully attained his majority, though his twenty-first birthday was yet "in posse" on the calendar. Meantime he attended the evening drawing-

classes at the Beaux Arts school, those competitions which start the French youth in the attainment of the prize of Rome, though foreigners can only receive the practice, not the prize. Four successive "honorable mentions" rewarded Beckwith for these labors at the Beaux Arts, and one would like to see the drawings, doubtless of commanding excellence by this time.

At this period an additional ceiling of Marie de Medicis' palace of the Luxembourg was allotted for decoration, and Carolus Duran received the order, as the nearest approach to a modern Rubens, whose pencil was to continue the color-splendors already strewn over the walls by the great Fleming. M. Carolus conceived a "plafond" in true Rubens style, with Marie trumpeted by Fame in the portico of a temple whose columns rushed up into the sky in steepest perspective. For the preliminary tracings—nay, even for the completed paintings—the master applied to his foremost pupils, whence it happens that the brushwork of these young Americans looks down from the ceiling of one of the proudest palaces in Europe. Beckwith drew in one of the most important figures, that of Fame. Sargent, already cele-

brated for his portraits, painted his master's portrait, in an obscure group "practicated," as the French say, in a corner of the composition.

His chosen friends in Paris at this period were George Becker, the painter of the famous "Rizpah"; George's brother Alfred, a student in the atelier of Carolus; Russell, a Canadian, and Sargent, the Philadelphia painter who has had such marked success. In 1876 he hired a studio, and in 1877 was ready to send in his first Salon picture, a portrait of an aged man; this also was Sargent's first year at the Salon, where he exhibited a female portrait; his greater sensation, the "Fishers of Cancale," was to come the year after. For the Universal Exposition of 1878 Beckwith prepared "The Falconer," a decorative study of an Adonis-like Italian model. In this year, after a hasty examination of the Champ de Mars, with its world-compelling glories, he

packed up his hopes and his clothes and brought them all to America. Chicago, even in its Phœnix-aspect of marvellous resurrection, was not now to his taste. He established himself in New York, and was quickly called upon to dispense to others the ideas he had imbibed in the French atelier.

The Art Students' League, in this city, had drifted into a control that was necessarily unsatisfactory to the wisest of its well-wishers. A very wild sort of impressionism, seemingly based upon the laying-in or preparatory study of some portrait by Lubach, viewed and admired in Germany—a wild decorative ambition, which while repudiating Makart and Siemiradski had a great deal of their tawdriness—seemed to be the guiding ideas of the place. Tricky methods of coloring, frisky wipings-out with the paint-rag; in fine, a smart imitation of Nature's effects of light and color without the rudimentary discipline of thorough drawing—these principles ran riot in the ambitious young school, and made it attractive while preparing to make it ridiculous. The deliciousness of "tone," the preciousness of "quality," the value of the "tache," the grades of chiaroscuro, were sought with voluptuous eagerness by the young poets of the school, followed by a mad chorus of highly impressional students. This method of study has its good side and its bad side. It arrives at charming representations of still-life, where the accuracy of the drawing is not of much importance. It may even do for genre subjects, where the artist has little need to chasten his line and purify his taste. For ideal subjects and all the wide scope of serious art, it is completely inadmissible. Its lessons are certainly useful, in divorcing the student from the black, dry, opaque handling of old-fashioned official or academic art. But in a school for young people it is dangerous and nothing but dangerous. To teach a docile

over the preliminary study of anatomy and the lessons of the antique, is a specious but crazy notion, sure to

in the studio any more than in the counting-house, and the young artist who is permitted to indulge the de-

light of his color-sense before he has chastised his taste for form is a young artist who has miscalculated his spring, and will be laughed at when he leaps upon the world with his short-comings. The president of the League was uneasy at this obvious tendency of his academy, and called upon Beckwith to remedy it. A better man was certainly not in the country for the purpose. A keen natural sense of the beauty of line and the purity of form had been improved by the study of classical marbles and the paintings of the old masters. Beckwith was made master of the antique class, and in 1879 departed with a little dribble of money to see what unknown plaster casts could be picked up in Europe. He did wonders with the sum at his disposal, and the little collection of casts at the League is different from that in other schools, in that every morsel is adapted to the use of students, and is the choice of one who knows what examples study requires for its peculiar needs. The position he now occupies at the League is, perhaps, the most important there. A strenuous opponent of the great tide of facile art which has invaded, not only the school but the country, he stands like Leonidas in the breach, and his triumph is great when he can wrest off some young victim from one of the painting-classes, and make him perfect himself at the necessary drill among the great secrets of constructive design. It is characteristic of his bright, sunny temper and winning personality that he is a prime social favorite with the very instructors whom it is his business to nullify.

Mr. Beckwith's work in this country has been chiefly in portraiture. His large "Lady in Red," in the Academy of 1879, made an immediate sensation, for its ease, felicity, perfect pose and breadth of style.

"Don't put in too many things," has always been the warning of Carolus Duran to his pupils, and in a cer-



"SCHERZO." CRAYON SKETCH BY J. CARROLL BECKWITH.

youth to let his nerves swoon with rapture over color effects, and try to hurry them on to his canvas, leaping

turn out a school of half-baked hypochondriacs, noisome to heaven and earth. Two and two do not make five

tain width of view his pupil always shows that he remembers the lesson. His "Ethel," in the Philadelphia Artists' Exhibition of 1881, was a lovely and graceful creation, superior to the portraits by Sargent hung at the same time in the Academy exhibition of that city.

With the crayon, Beckwith simply luxuriates. His hand is inimitably supple, firm and graceful in manipulating this implement. Whether sketching from an old master in a Venetian church, or picking up a graceful form or posture from the street, he draws with fine sweep and an unfailing sentiment of grace.

EDWARD STRAHAN.

BOSTON CORRESPONDENCE.

THE talk in Boston during the week I write this is of the Alvin Adams collection, which has been on exhibition for several days, and which will have been disposed of long before this will appear in print. "The talk in Boston," I say, and yet the talk is confined mostly to the class composed of those who look at art with uncultured eyes rather than with those which have been trained to criticise and discriminate. There is little, it may be judged from this, that is of true merit, and hence of lasting interest, in Mr. Adams's collection. The late veteran expressman liked pictures, and bought what he liked—and understood. Hence a critic or a connoisseur going through this collection will not find many agreeable stopping-places in front of pictures, and but few oases in the dull desert of commonplace canvases. Two Bierstadts cover a tremendous wall space, and are good examples of a literal phase of topographical, geographical art. The earlier of the canvases is the less theatrical of the two, and hence the better. The other, in a pool in the foreground, say half a mile from the spectator, shows a little fish of the minnow species caught at a moment's rest in the shallow water. I have no doubt, with a good pair of opera-glasses, the little fellow's eyes could be discovered. Shades of the ghostly impressionists, who shall decry your efforts after this!

There is a "Yosemite" by Thomas Hill, bearing date 1871, that indicates an approach toward the methods and the ideas shown in his Centennial "Yosemite," and hence is better than his previous California work, though his later pictures are better still. The peculiar lack of this exhibition is in living ideas and motives in sympathy with the day. There are few pictures that have any real value to-day, and fewer still that will have any a quarter of a century hence. Many of the studies in figure and costume look vulgar and commonplace rather than quaint and interesting. The painter who is an artist invests his picture with such an individuality and such an excuse for being, that it is a picture of the time for all time; but the one who lacks

the genuine inspiration of art gives us the phase of his time that is not vitalized, and hence seems warped and puny. Seldom have I seen this idea more decidedly illustrated than in this collection, which the late owner gathered inside of the generation that is now in middle life, and which in its strained, old-fashioned look is painful in view of this fact, and shows how shortlived even fair art is. Only the true virile art, with thought for its inspiration, and feeling for its handmaid, can hope for life beyond its own generation. Even the best painters are represented by their poorest works—those with a cheap touch and a glamour of the chromo idea, if it be proper to look inversely for illustration. It shows how much bad art is afloat, and how clever salesmen can induce people with more enthusiasm and crude love for the beautiful than culture and fine art education to exchange their easily earned money for easily painted pictures. And yet I would not say that there were no

gallery, by Alice M. Curtis, who was one of the late W. M. Hunt's pupils—almost the only one with any distinct individuality—and who shows that master's teachings in their best form, with ideas of her own as well. She calls her work "Sketches and Studies," and at once disarms criticism, because this is precisely what they are, with approaches to elaborate pictures here and there that show what may be considered among the possibilities and even probabilities of her future. For a young woman who is feeling her way in the world, they are remarkable; and that their sale may enable her to continue her studies until some results more like pictures are produced is almost an assured fact. She has ideas, and for some time yet art needs ideas more than elaboration, which is bad when the foundation has not been laid intelligently and consistently.

I have discovered ideas also in a collection of pictures shown at A. A. Childs & Company's, though in too many of them good color and decided handling are lacking. The painter is a young man named Fred Gary, who is a native of Iowa, and who has painted in that State and in and about Chicago. What he wants is study in that branch of the French landscape school represented by Daubigny in subject and Corot in treatment. What I mean is that he must study the ideas that Daubigny advances in simplicity of composition, though avoiding any attempt to ape that artist's strength, which at present would be quite impossible to attain. From this, the Corot part of my reference will be understood, especially when I say that his subjects are prairie bits mostly, at least those that are good for anything are. All of our painters go trooping across the Western prairies, never halting till they come to a mountain, when they pause in awe. First Bierstadt did it, then Thomas Hill, then William Keith, then—all of them. As a consequence, there is a vast expanse of country that is looked upon as a desert by popular superstition, encouraged by the painters, who are looking for something striking, and fail to see the simple beauty at their feet. Mr. Gary has



SKETCH BY J. CARROLL BECKWITH.

good pictures in the collection. There were good ones, but no great ones—not even one that I discovered. And yet I shall not be surprised to see follow this letter in a few days reports of great prices paid for examples. Mr. Adams began this collection when it was looked upon in Boston as almost a sinful waste of money to buy pictures, when theatres were closed by law on Saturday nights, and when consequently there was a great deal of narrowness and ignorance all about. Turning from examples of the constrained and pretentious in art to a style that ignores all idea of finish, and deals with the impressional and sketchy with a little of hardness and stiffness, perhaps resulting from a too severe but natural reaction, let us look for a moment at a collection of about thirty sketches and studies in Eastman Chase's

seen this, and attempted to paint it, in several of the pictures with sufficient success to show that it can be done. Study and determination on Mr. Gary's part will doubtless show that he possesses ideas and the ability to make them manifest. At least it looks that way to me now.

I have stepped into Doll & Richards's gallery over and over again to see a portrait-picture (no other word will describe it) by George Fuller. It represents a young miss, bare-headed, with hair of a modest brown combed simply down and back, with no "smart" "frizzes," with a yellowish gown, finished with lace at the neck, and short sleeves, one hand grasping a bunch of "pussy willow" branches, and the other hanging by her side, with a suggestion of movement as